



News Release

For immediate release: June 16, 2010

(10-093)

Contacts: [Gordon MacCracken](#), Communications Office
[Allison Cook](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

360-236-4022

West Nile virus monitoring underway; avoiding mosquito bites is key *Washington had worst year ever for disease in 2009*

OLYMPIA — The arrival of mosquitoes means the Washington State Department of Health and its partners have begun surveillance for West Nile virus. Testing for the virus began on June 1. In 2009, the virus was first detected in mosquitoes collected in late May in Yakima County. No positive results have been found in Washington yet this spring.

Last year was Washington's most active year to date with 38 human cases, including one death.

“That shows we should take West Nile virus seriously,” said [Gregg Grunenfelder](#), the department's assistant secretary for environmental health. “This virus can make a lot of people sick — or worse — and preventing mosquito bites is the best way to avoid getting infected.”

[\(Note: audio cuts available online.\)](#)

The key is to avoid mosquito bites and reduce mosquito larvae habitat:

- Stay indoors when mosquitoes are most active (dusk to dawn).
- Make sure screens on doors and windows are working properly.
- Cover exposed skin with light-colored clothing when outside in the evening.
- Use an effective repellent on exposed skin. Always follow the directions on the label.
- Reduce mosquito larvae habitat around the home by dumping standing water.
- Change water in birdbaths, fountains, wading pools, animal troughs, and other sources twice a week.

West Nile infection can be very serious, and even fatal, for some people. While most people bitten by a mosquito carrying West Nile virus don't become ill, some may have mild to severe flu-like symptoms. A few may develop a serious neurological disease. People over 50 and those with compromised immune systems are at greater risk for serious illness.

— More —

Anyone who finds a recently (within 24 hours) dead crow, magpie, raven, jay, or raptor can [report dead birds](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) (www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/ts/Zoo/WNV/reportdeadbird.html) online. They may also contact their [local health agency](http://www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/LHJMap/LHJMap.htm). These birds often die after being infected with West Nile virus. They can be an early warning that mosquitoes in the area may be carrying the virus.

Horses are also susceptible to West Nile virus, but vaccines and an annual booster can protect them. Horse owners should contact a veterinarian to learn about vaccinating horses.

More information about [West Nile virus](http://www.doh.wa.gov/WNV) (www.doh.wa.gov/WNV) is available by calling the agency's West Nile virus information line, 1-866-78-VIRUS (1-866-788-4787). Updates are also posted on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/WA_DeptofHealth) (http://twitter.com/WA_DeptofHealth).

###

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
--